By John Paine

A LETTER FROM AN OFFICER RETIRED.

[Price 6 *d.*]

A

LETTER

FROM AN

OFFICER RETIRED,

TO HIS

SON IN PARLIAMENT.

O Patria! O Divûm domus Ilion! inclyta bello
Mœnia Dardanidum!

A NEW EDITION.

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I am determined to die in my own houſe, and be buried with my fathers; I will not ſuffer myſelf to be dragged from one end of England to the other (with a great probability of dying in an inn upon the road, or in lodgings at Bath;) for a paltry chance of prolonging an inſignificant, and now rather a painful exiſtence. No, Charles! that muſt not be; nothing remains for me but to die decently. During the better part of my life I ſerved in the army, not without reputation; and when I die I leave behind me a ſon whom I love and eſteem, to inherit the family eſtate, which I have not impaired. I have acted my part, and I care not how ſoon the curtain falls.

The ſtrain of this letter grows more ſerious than I intended; but I ſhall not reſiſt my feelings. My mind is ſerious: deeply affected with the melancholy

lancholy account of public affairs, which you have ſent me, I mourn over the calamities of my country, and mean to pour out my heart to you. Excuſe the prolixity of age, the earneſtneſs of a father; conſider what I am about to write as my moſt genuine and deliberate ſentiments; regard the counſel which I give as my laſt advice. Perſiſt in your preſent parliamentary conduct; ſupport thoſe who aſſert and maintain the rights of Britain againſt the claims of America. For ſome years paſt I have, with all the attention in my power, examined the merits of that controverſy, which is now to be decided by arms. I am fully ſatisfied that the Britiſh legiſlature is ſupreme over the whole empire, and has an undoubted right to bind America by its ſtatutes: a right that the legiſlature has conſtantly exerciſed in a great

variety of caſes, which mark and eſtabliſh ſovereignty. That even as to direct taxation, there are many acts of parliament impoſing taxes upon his Majeſty's American ſubjects *, the authority of which acts has never been till now diſputed, and the taxes impoſed by them have been uniformly paid. But if there had been no exerciſe of this right of legiſlature prior to the preſent times, the right would have remained entire, and the ſovereignty of the ſtate would have been equally entitled to impoſe upon his Majeſty's protected and highly indulged ſubjects of America, a part of the public burden and expence of government. The only juſt ground of reſiſtance to the ſupreme authority, is the tyrannical exerciſe of that authority: for I do not affirm with the declaratory ſtatute of the ſixth of the

* Vide Rights of Britain aſſerted, p. 36, 37, 38.

preſent

preſent reign, that the imperial crown and parliament of Great Britain have authority to make ſtatutes which ſhall bind the people of the colonies *in all caſes whatſ ever*. On the contrary, I hold that the king and parliament have no ſuch authority over the people of Great Britain. Suppoſe, for inſtance, that a bill ſhould paſs the two houſes of parliament and receive the royal aſſent, declaring the preſent houſe of commons perpetual, and the ſeats hereditary; enacting that, in caſes of extinction and failure of the line, all vacancies ſhould be filled up by the ſovereign, or by the houſe itſelf; is there an Engliſhman who would heſitate to pronounce ſuch an act unconſtitutional, tyrannical, and reſiſtance to it moſt juſt and lawful? In like manner, upon the ſame principle, if the king and parliament had impoſed a poll-tax of ten or five

pounds a man, upon every American ſubject, undoubtedly the Americans would have had a right to reſiſt ſuch oppreſſion.

But the coloniſts do not plead oppreſſive immoderate taxation, and indeed they have no reaſon; they abſolutely deny the right itſelf, and reject with diſdain the moderate and ſelf-denying propoſitions of the houſe of commons, on the twentieth of February laſt *, allowing them, in conſideration of their contributing a certain proportion to the common defence, to tax themſelves. Theſe propoſitions the Americans will not accept; they deny the ſupremacy of Great Britain, even thus qualified, and openly avow their long-projected ſcheme of inde-

* Made by Lord North to the Houſe, and reſolved by a great majority.

pendence.

pendence. If once independent, America is the rival and enemy of Britain. The united colonies of North America, for ſo they call themſelves, from their ſituation, in a great meaſure command the Weſt India iſlands. In proceſs of time they may ſubdue both the iſlands and the continent. Is not this (ſay ſome idle ſpeculatiſts) a pleaſing idea? Would it not be a glorious ſpectacle, to behold a new empire founded upon the principles of liberty, rear its head above the languid and exhauſted governments of Europe? To me the idea is not pleaſing; the ſpectacle, were I to live to ſee it, would be horrid. I love my native country, and admire the Britiſh conſtitution. Never was there a form of government more favourable to the welfare of the human race. Never did Greece or Rome—— but I forget myſelf. Argument is impertinent here.

Men

Men do not reaſon in their country's cauſe: they feel, I hope they feel, for the intereſt, for the glory of Britain, and abhor the thought of ſacrificing her greatneſs to that of any people upon earth. Yet you tell me that there are men of worth and virtue, who contend that we ought in juſtice to yield to America, and allow her claim of independence, (for, if the Britiſh ſtatutes do not bind that country, America is an independent ſtate). Theſe gentlemen, you ſay, defend their opinion by arguments drawn from the natural rights and original equality of mankind; undefined and undefinable terms, not applicable to human affairs, and ridiculous even in ſcholaſtic argument. I dare ſay that the number of ſuch ſincere and metaphyſical patriots is but ſmall. To be a patriot in the abſtract, a patriot of the univerſe, to be

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the friend of America againſt Britain, is a ſort of enthuſiaſm that I can neither feel nor comprehend. The conception is too ſublime for me; my narrow ſoul cannot extend itſelf ſo far, nor can any argument convince me, that I ought with pleaſure to behold America riſe upon the ruins of Britain. I will avow to you my moſt ſecret thoughts, aye, and to the world. It has long been my opinion, that we ſhould reſtrain the growing power, and effectually ſecure the obedience of America: if that is not the object of the preſent war, we fight for nothing. Britain, like the pelican, has fed her young with her blood; grown ſtrong, they riſe up to prey upon her vitals. Every principle of reaſon, juſtice, and policy, require that ſhe ſhould exert her force, and eſtabliſh her juſt ſupremacy.

What

What do the favourers of American rebellion expect, or hope, or wiſh, as the end and concluſion of the preſent conteſt? If we do not ſubdue America, will ſhe not prove a moſt pernicious enemy? Is not the intereſt of the one country henceforth diametrically oppoſite to that of the other? Whatever America gains, independence, commerce, dominion, glory, ſo much does Britain loſe; as the Americans riſe, whilſt independent and hoſtile, we ſink in the ſcale of nations. Oppoſite intereſts and jealouſy of growing empire, have ever been deemed ſufficient cauſe of war. All political writers have laid down the law of nations thus, and every nation, from the beginning of the world, have acted upon this principle. Without conſidering our ancient ſupremacy (I might uſe a ſtronger word, and ſay our creation

of

of the colonies), our long and expenſive protection of them, their conſtant obedience and ſubjection; conſider only their and our relative ſituations. The Americans are at this moment making war upon Britain, they are taking our ſhips, killing our ſoldiers, invading and conquering our provinces. Shall we ſay to them, Well done, ye good and faithful ſubjects of the Britiſh empire; ſince you have rebelled againſt us, we ſubmit to you. This is what the Americans demand, they declare in their treaty of confederation and perpetual union *, that they will not be reconciled to Britain, till the acts reſtraining their commerce are repealed, till reparation is made for ſhutting up the port of Boſton, for burning Charlestown, for the expence of this unjuſt war, and till all the Britiſh troops

* Vide Article 13.

are

are recalled from America. This is the Language of Maſters, the Style of Conquerors to the conquered. Yet I am told, that there are ſoldiers who ſay that the Americans are in the right, and that they will not draw their ſwords in an unjuſt quarrel. What ſort of citizen is he, whoſe private judgment arraigns and condemns his country? What ſort of ſoldier is he who deſerts his country's cauſe? Is it not ſufficient for a ſoldier, for an Engliſhman, that he fights for England? That was the cauſe for which I fought in two great wars; I did not examine the grounds of the quarrel between England and Spain in 1741, nor the more recent cauſe of hoſtility in 1756, when we engaged in that bloody and expenſive war with France for the protection of America. With a good conſcience, with all my heart and ſoul, I fought the

quarrel

quarrel of my country; and now, if I had health and ſtrength, I ſhould with as clear a ſpirit fight againſt America in the ſame good cauſe. O, Charles! I am afflicted with the daily accounts of our loſſes and defeats; the victories and triumphs of the Americans torment me more than my diſeaſe. Some of my brave companions have fallen in thoſe wretched battles. Have we no provident Stateſmen? No ſkilful Generals? What efforts did Britain make during the laſt glorious war, when ſhe contended with France for the frontier of America! How feeble are her efforts now, when ſhe contends for America, for her Commerce, and, dearer ſtill, for her Glory. Is Britain exhauſted of men and money? Is the ſpirit of her people fled? Can they bear to be vanquiſhed by the Americans? Would they ſhrink from an

enterpriſing Miniſter, jealous of national honour, and vehement to urge the war! Why did your Miniſters at firſt loſe their time (the precious moments that are paſt, in making ineffectual laws? for ineffectual againſt armed men are laws not ſupported by arms. Why did they not ſend two years ago an armament equal to the object? A ſmall army, much ſmaller than is now neceſſary, would then perhaps have prevented bloodſhed, would certainly have ended the war with honour. Did your miniſters imagine that acts of parliament were like the Pope's bulls in former times, which quelled the hearts of men, made kings ſurrender their crowns, and ſoldiers lay down their arms?

Whilſt our miniſters were framing laws and paſſing acts of parliament, the miniſters of the congreſs were levying

vying men and training ſoldiers; and when our general, truſting, it would ſeem, to lawful authority, ſent a ſmall body of men, like conſtables, to ſeize the arms of the rebels; the Americans attacked your troops, drove them along for twenty miles, and ſcalped the unfortunate victims of civil and military folly. The poor brave ſoldier did not deſerve that miſerable fate. I don't blame my fellow ſoldiers for the events of this ſhameful campaign; I blame the general, who ſacrificed the brave ſoldiers and the gallant officers.

I know the ſources of our misfortunes, an unwillingneſs to believe that the Americans durſt proceed to extremities, a ſpirit of economy and negociation, a vain hope of patching up a reconciliation without violence. All theſe operated upon the

minds of miniſters, loth and reluctant to engage in war. From this fatal, though natural diſpoſition, to ſhow the Americans that Britain was placable, and averſe to open the temple of Janus, they continued in his command, the general upon the ſpot, whoſe neareſt connection was American; he was appointed governor of Boſton, as well as commander in chief. Never was there a more unfortunate choice. The governor was miſtaken in every opinion and information which he gave. The general was unſucceſsful in every military enterpriſe.

Under his orders the regular, the veteran, the once victorious troops of Britain in the firſt encounter with the raw Americans retreated, or rather fled before them from morn to night, a ſummer's-day. In the next

encounter,

encounter, under his orders, under his eye, though he ſtood at a ſafe diſtance, the troops carried the poſt, indeed, but one half of them fell in the ill-concerted attack.

I am unwilling to purſue ſo diſagreeable a ſubject, and enumerate a long train of errors and abſurdities. Yet I muſt ſay one word more, elſe my heart will burſt. O, Charles! I tremble for the troops at Boſton. Why, in the name of God, were they ſent there! by the advice of the general who was to execute the meaſures which he directed. He had been long in America—If he had never been in America, if he had only looked at the map with the eye of an officer, he muſt have ſeen at one glance that Boſton was the worſt of all poſſible places to occupy; that the

camp of Boſton was the camp of Pirna.

The darkneſs of my thoughts, my grief for the paſt, my apprehenſions of the future, vaniſh in ſome degree before the aſſurances which you give of the firm purpoſe of adminiſtration to proſecute the war with vigour. Readily do I accept every apology that truth and candour can make for their conduct. It is true, that the ſtateſman of this country is ſeldom or never a ſoldier; and therefore he is more apt to err in military than in civil affairs. It is likewiſe true, that it was generally believed the propoſitions of the 20th of February laſt, would have been accepted by the Americans, as the baſis of a ſolid reconciliation; and therefore candour obliges me to acknowledge that a great and expenſive effort laſt year, though

though I think it was neceſſary, would then have met with more oppoſition at home, and have been leſs popular than now. But I do not agree with you in the cenſure you paſs upon the officers, who you ſay lulled the miniſters aſleep by undervaluing the proweſs of the Americans. I believe in my conſcience that the officers ſpoke the truth, and juſtly deſcribed the Americans as an unwarlike people; they were ſo then, but you have given them time to acquire diſcipline, and learn the uſe of arms; they are become more warlike, not that I think them formidable, or capable of reſiſting the force of this country, which, when properly exerted, ſo lately wrought ſuch wonders in every quarter of the globe. It is high time to exert it now, and I rejoice to hear that the miniſters are rouſed from their lethargy. I hope

they

they will not fall aſleep again; it is in vain to think of peace till you have proved your ſuperiority in war. We muſt fight and conquer, before we can treat with the rebellious, and hitherto triumphant, Americans. Inculcate that principle, inforce that axiom of ſound policy; encourage and aſſiſt the miniſter, the preſent miniſter; for by him we muſt abide, (I look round in vain for another); ſupport him in his endeavours to eſtabliſh the ſovereignty of Britain over her colonies, and to wipe off the ſhameful ſtain which the laſt campaign has left on the Britiſh arms; that, to me is an object; that idea preſſes on a ſoldier's mind. I am not cruel; ſcarcely could I ever be prevailed upon in courts martial to give my voice for death; but I wiſh from my ſoul that peace may be uſhered in by victory. Send a powerful army,

my, and ſend forth your generals accuſtomed to conquer in America; let it be tried if the Americans are, as they boaſt, more mighty than we; let that be tried upon an equal field. Though the numbers ſhould be unequal, I truſt that we ſhall regain our honour, and compel the inſolent Americans to own the ſuperiority of Engliſh valour. Till then we cannot, we ought not to make peace. Conſider how the Romans acted in circumſtances much more perilous than theſe in which we are at preſent. In the midſt of the civil war between Marius and Sylla, whilſt Mithridates, the moſt dangerous enemy of the Roman name, covered Aſia and Europe with his armies, the ſtates of Italy, who had not the freedom of the city, with one conſent demanded that privilege. The Senate and People of Rome refuſed a demand ſupported by menaces

menaces and arms. The Italians to a man rebelled. Battle after battle was fought, with various ſucceſs. At laſt, with their whole force collected, the rebels marched to Rome. Teleſinus, a Samnite, commanded their army, complete in Roman arms, in Roman diſcipline, and in Roman valour. The declared intention of the rebels was to burn and deſtroy the city of Rome, and transfer to ſome of their own cities the ſeat of empire. Sylla encountered them at the gates of Rome: the battle was obſtinate and bloody beyond example. More than once Sylla deſpaired of victory, though fighting under the walls of Rome. At laſt his genius, and the fortune of Rome prevailed. Teleſinus, with the greater part of his army, fell in the field. When the rebels were ſubdued, the Senate granted the freedom of the city to all

all the ſtates of Italy. Such was the ſpirit of the people that ſubdued the world! to ſuch a height did the Roman eagle ſoar in her way to empire! Let Britain, emulous of Roman magnanimity and valour, ſubdue her rebels; and then imitate the heroic policy of Rome, let the imperial crown and parliament of Britain grant to the Americans every communicable privilege, every degree of liberty conſiſtent with their ſubordination to the ſovereign ſtate. Our patriots, you may ſay, are not like Sylla, who, though the leader of a party, revered the image of his country, and raiſed higher than ever, amongſt foreign nations, the honour of the Roman name. I confeſs they are not; I know that the factions of this country have brought forward and ripened before its time the conteſt with America. If Britain had been

united,

united, perhaps the Americans would never have ventured to reſiſt her authority; certainly this mild and gentle reign would not have been the æra of American rebellion. When the feeble miniſtry, in the year 1766, repealed the ſtamp-act, they gave the ſignal of rebellion to the colonies; which, if then reſtrained and coerced, would probably have ſubmitted, or rather muſt have ſubmitted, to the ſteady hand of authority, and have reſted in eaſe and opulence under the broad banner of Britain.

From that memorable day, when the celebrated patriot ſounded his trumpet for the colonies againſt his country, and with the blaſt terrified a timid miniſtry; from that day the Americans began to contemn the authority of parliament, and realize their dreams of independence. From that

that day too, the factions of this country, after the example of ſo able and ſo ſucceſsful a leader, looked to America as a magazine and arſenal of arms and ammunition, for their political warfare againſt every ſucceeding miniſter. The event has exceeded their moſt ſanguine expectations. I believe they did not hope, I ſhould be glad to think that they did not wiſh, what they now behold, though it is the work of their own hands,

Noſtrorum cauſa malorum nos ſumus.

But the language of our patriots is not equivocal; without reſerve, in public and in private, they contend fiercely for America. Shocking and monſtrous as it may ſeem to calm and ſober minds, who are not in the vortex of faction, yet certain it is, that the patriots rejoice in the victories of the rebels, the ſlaughter of

their countrymen, and the diſgrace of England. They are delighted even with loſſes and calamities that do no honour to their American friends; the loſs of a tranſport full of Engliſh ſoldiers, who periſh in the waves, is a ſubject of joy and exultation: like the barbarians on the coaſt of Cornwall or the Orkneys, they pray for ſtorms and ſhipwrecks. If they expect to become popular by avowing ſuch unnatural ſentiments, they will be miſerably diſappointed. Humanity, nationality, ſelf-love, revolt againſt them. The people of England, proud of empire purchaſed with their blood, (for Canada was dearly bought), proud of their valour and ancient glory in war, will not give their confidence and their love to an oppoſition, whoſe conduct and principles manifeſtly tend to humble their pride, to diminiſh their empire, to ſtain

ſtain their glory, and proſtrate England at the feet of America.

To gain popularity, on whoſe wings ambition riſes to power, the patriots ſhould have attacked adminiſtration for indolence, inactivity, and neglect; they ſhould have tried to excite againſt them the indignation of a great people unaccuſtomed to defeat, and impatient of diſgrace; caught in the toils of ſhame, the Britiſh lion would have raged againſt thoſe who tied the cords.

The real fault of adminiſtration is, that they have done too little: oppoſition, blinder than moles, arraign them for having done too much. Hence the minds of the people are perplexed and ſuſpended; clamour is ſilent, and adminiſtration reſt ſecure under the ſhield of their adverſaries.

You and your friends, the independent gentlemen of England, ought now to do what this abſurd oppoſition ſhould have done. Inquire into the cauſes of our misfortunes; cenſure, where there is ground of cenſure, the conduct of every miniſter in his department, and of every officer in his ſtation, who, from neglect, incapacity, or from a worſe motive, (if any there are who have ſo deeply offended), failed in their duty, and contributed to the public calamity. Blame adminiſtration in particular for departing from the juſt and conſtitutional exerciſe of the executive power lodged in the hands of the ſovereign, and by him delegated to his miniſters: that power is the active energy of the ſtate, the abuſe of which by the miniſter, parliament may controul and puniſh; but parliament does not fit to direct the conduct

duct of war, and give its ſanction, its abſolution, to every meaſure of government. This is my opinion of what you ſhould do: however, ſtill more attentive to the future than the paſt, encourage the miniſter to proſecute the war with vigour; convince him that he will be ſupported in more deciſive, more authoritative, and more peremptory meaſures than thoſe which he has yet purſued. Nothing has happened hitherto to diſmay the moſt apprehenſive mind; one great effort in the next campaign will not only repair the loſſes, but obliterate the memory of the laſt.

I am, &c.

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